THE

HOSPITAL

FOR

POOR FRENCH PROTESTANTS

AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

RESIDING IN GREAT BRITAIN

(commonly known as "THE FRENCH HOSPITAL,")

Victoria Park Road, London, E. 9.

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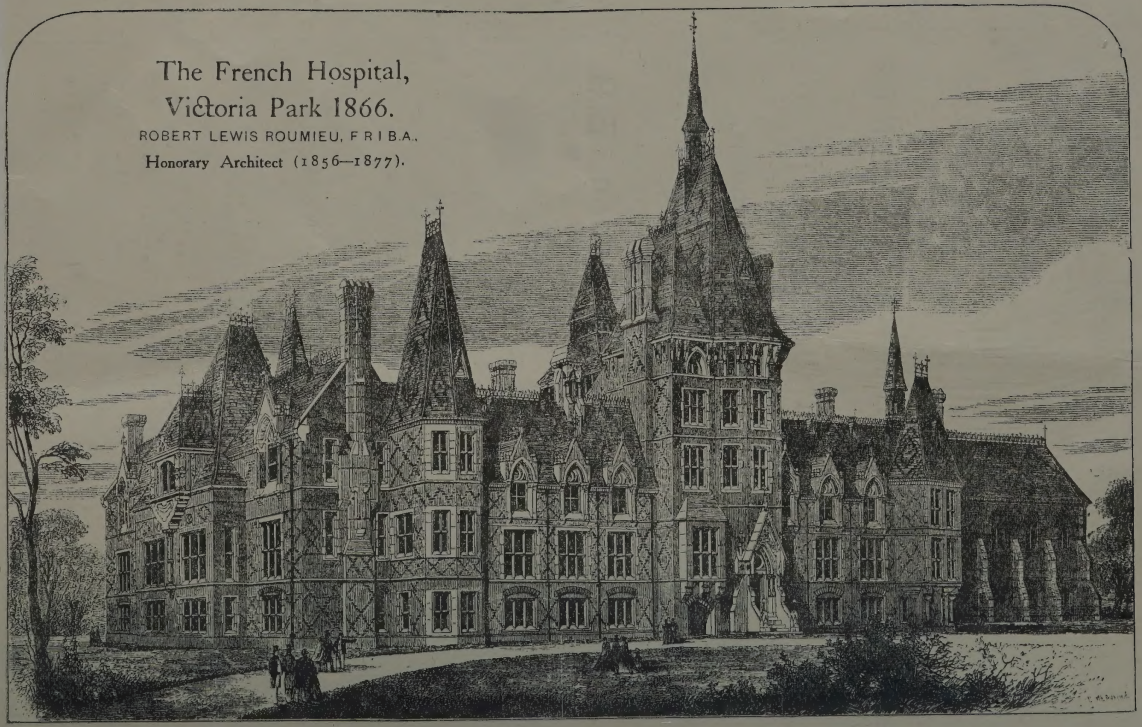

THE FRENCH HOSPITAL,

VICTORIA PARK, LONDON, E. 9.

Among the distinctly Huguenot Institutions in England few have had a more interesting history, or a more useful existence, than the *hospice* founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by the French Protestant Refugees, for the relief of the poor and aged among their body. The forced exile of the Huguenot Ministers, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was the signal for flight to thousands of French Protestants of both sexes and of all classes and ages, and in spite of the penalties proclaimed against emigration, and the punishments inflicted upon those who were arrested in the attempt to leave their country, an enormous number of persons did effect their escape to the various Protestant States in Europe, and even to the then newly settled American colonies, but principally to our shores. It is not surprising that, under such conditions, very large numbers of the Refugees reached us in a state of extreme destitution.

The contemporary accounts of the sufferings endured by the refugees are heart-rending; the sympathies of the English people were deeply stirred by the spectacle of their distress, and every aid and encouragement were given to the immigrants to find suitable employment in the land of their adoption.

As time went on, the various individual members of this great body settled down to the positions for which their previous education and experience, or their general abilities fitted them. The banished ministers soon found themselves surrounded by congregations of their fellow-exiles, and in the enjoyment of the unspeakable privilege of worshipping God after the dictates of their own conscience. The Army and Navy, the Bar and other liberal professions, became enriched by the absorption of many who had already won distinction in their own country. Manufactories sprung up, looms were started, gardens were cultivated, and a hundred other tokens indicated the presence amongst us of a new

element of intelligence and industry; but with all this there remained a great number of the Refugees who, from the effects of their cruel sufferings, or from old age or other causes, were unable to hold their own in the race of life, and whose care became a self-imposed burden upon their more prosperous brethren.

Committees were formed in the early days of the immigration to regulate the distribution of the large sums which were contributed by the English people and from the privy purse of the Sovereign for the relief of the most pressing necessities of the Refugees, and it is worthy of note that this system of voluntary service in the administration of charitable Trusts has been observed to the present day in connection with all the Huguenot Charities.

In the year 1708, Monsieur de Gastigny, a French Protestant Refugee in the service of the Prince of Orange, bequeathed £1,000 for the purpose of founding a Hospital. Many amongst the most prosperous Refugees contributed to the same object, so that within a few years the scheme for a Huguenot Asylum took definite shape, and in 1718, the Managers, having previously commenced the building, obtained from King George the First a Royal Charter of Incorporation, under the title of **"The Hospital for poor French Protestants and their Descendants residing in Great Britain."**

Adapting itself to the changing condition of the class whose needs it was designed to meet, the Institution at first partook more of the character of a rendezvous for the poor Refugees, where their immediate necessities were supplied and where also they found friendly counsel and assistance in determining their plans for the future and in communicating with their friends; but even at this time a permanent "Hospice" was also provided for a certain number of aged and infirm people, so that, abbreviating the rather long title bestowed upon the scheme by the Charter of Incorporation, the Hospital was for very many years known lovingly among the Refugees as **"La Providence."** The lapse of a generation or two so far changed the character of the Institution that it came to be solely an asylum for the poor and aged among the descendants of Refugees.

The first buildings were erected on a plot of ground near the Peerless Pool, in the Parish of St. Luke, at that time on the northern outskirts of the metropolis. The buildings were surrounded by pleasant gardens from which green lanes led to Islington and the northern parts of London; but all traces of these sunny spots have long since been obliterated by the advancing tide of civilization. The life of the great city crept up to the Hospital boundaries, the income of the Corporation was diminished through the death of the chief supporters of the Hospital and the gradual absorption of their descendants into the English population, and the Directors were compelled to pull down part of the Hospital buildings and to let on building leases part of the garden ground. We can imagine the extreme reluctance with which such a step was taken, yet the result has shown its prudence, for, owing to the increased income derived from the renewed leases, the Directors, in 1865, were enabled, without any appeal to the public, to erect and maintain the building near Victoria Park, which affords a comfortable home to sixteen men and thirty-six women, being aged and poor descendants of French Protestant Refugees, or themselves French Protestants. Married couples and persons under sixty years of age are not admitted.

A view of the Building is shown in the annexed engraving. The Basement contains the Store Rooms, Kitchens, Bath Rooms, Laundry, and other Offices; the Ground Floor is appropriated to the Court and Committee Rooms, the Refectory and Day Rooms for the Inmates; and the Upper Floor to the Dormitories, Invalids' Sitting Rooms, etc. The Steward's Rooms are in the centre of the building. At the East-end is a beautiful Chapel, in which daily morning and evening service is held. The Women's Day Room contains a small Library of suitable works for the Inmates' use. In the Men's Day Room is a Billiard Table, presented by one of the Directors, and in both Day Rooms the tables are furnished with several of the daily papers, and weekly illustrated periodicals, etc. In sunny weather the more active of the old people may often be found enjoying the grounds, while, whatever the aspect of the sky overhead, the men's smoking room is pretty sure to be tenanted. It is a rule of the Institution that during the morning the Inmates shall render what help they are able towards the general economy. The old ladies do most of the needlework required in the provision and maintenance of their own dress and of the household

linen, etc., and the men render a number of little services about the establishment.

The institution has gradually become, by gift, a storehouse of pictures and other memorials of Huguenot history. Among this collection is pre-eminent a library which deals with every aspect of Huguenot history, and has especial relation to the settlement of our forefathers in this country. A happy alliance with the Huguenot Society has enriched the collection still further, and it stands to-day as by far the most complete library on this special subject existing in the country. It contains upwards of 5,000 volumes, many of them of considerable rarity. The library is available for reference to those who take an interest in this special branch of history, upon application to the Honorary Secretary, and contributions of appropriate books or engravings will be very thankfully received.

A new Catalogue on the Card-Index System was compiled in 1928.

This interesting community is ruled over primarily by a Governor, Deputy-Governor, Treasurer, Secretary and about 40 other Directors, eight of whom are chosen at each General Court to be a working Committee for the ensuing quarter. The staff consists of the Chaplain, who is an ordained Clergyman of the Church of England; the Medical Officer, who attends 4 times a week and reports fully to the Committee at their monthly meetings, the Steward, who is also Clerk to the Corporation and who, under the Committee, has general charge of the Hospital; and an efficient staff of Nurses and Servants.

The Directors are, for the most part, representatives of, or descendants from, French Protestant Refugee families; clear proof thereof is required from all those of similar descent applying for any of the benefits of the Institution.

Although the Institution was designed to relieve French Protestants and their descendants of all classes, and its earlier records abound in the names of persons of the middle and higher ranks of society who benefited by its timely help, yet of late years the large number of applications for admission received from the operative Weavers and Weaveresses of

Spitalfields and Bethnal Green has seemed to indicate a danger of the impression gaining ground that the Hospital is intended to relieve this class only.

A searching inquiry was some time ago made by the Charity Commissioners into "the foundation, endowments, and objects "of the Corporation—its present circumstances, and whether "any and what improvement may be made in the management "or application of the Charity,"—the result was in the highest degree satisfactory to the Commissioners and gratifying to the Directors. The Inspector expressed a very strong opinion that the Building, grounds, and general arrangements of the Hospital were excellent, and he suggested that the benefits of the Charity should be made more widely known among descendants of the French Protestant Refugees, including those who now occupy a middle class in society. The Secretary of the Charity Commission, in transmitting a copy of the Inspector's report, pointed out the boon this Charity might be made to aged French Protestant Governesses and others of a simular class.

As a result of changing times and especially of Old Age Pensions, demands by the descendants of the French Refugees more and more take the form of requests for outdoor rather than indoor relief, and to meet these demands the Directors have certain funds at their disposal, namely :—

Coqueau Charity. To grant 10 poor maids or widows of the age of 50 years and upwards 10s. per month each.

Winsor Charity. To grant 5s. per month to two women and one man, most aged and destitute of those awaiting admission to the Hospital.

(Owing to improved dividends from investments, the allowances under the above two Charities are at present somewhat increased).

Huguenot Victoria Memorial Fund. Established in 1897, for granting small pensions to married couples or others who are ineligible for admission through physical or other causes or who, though eligible for admission, might, in the opinion of the Directors, better remain in their present homes. Recipients receive £12 per annum each, paid half-yearly.

BOISLIN FUND. Distributed on 21st December to poor and aged men and women, not Inmates of the Hospital, of Huguenot or French Protestant descent. At present ten recipients of £10 each.

FRENCH CHURCH "POOR FUND." In 1908 the Charity Commissioners handed over to the Directors of the Hospital the administration of a "poor fund" till then attached to the French Church in the Savoy. At present 22 recipients of £12 per annum, paid monthly.

MOUNIER APPRENTICESHIP FUND. Established under the Will of S. Mounier, a Director in 1750, for the apprenticing of poor boys. Two boys annually, premiums up to £30 each.

Until the War, the income of the Corporation was just sufficient for the careful maintenance of the Hospital, and there was no necessity for any appeal to the general public for subscriptions. The increased cost of living, however, during the past ten or more years has imposed upon the Directors the necessity of scrutinising every item of expenditure with the utmost care in order to make both ends meet. The praiseworthy practice of many of the earlier Directors and other Huguenots of remembering the Hospital in their Wills, is one which, if revived, would gradually build up the Capital Fund of the Hospital and enable such improvements in accommodation and service to be carried out as are demanded by modern standards of comfort. Huguenot descendants can therefore, if so minded, join hands with their ancestors in making the French Hospital the Central Charity for all classes of poor French Protestants and their descendants residing in Great Britain, and in preserving it as at once the most permanent and the most useful memorial of the immigration. This can be done, firstly, as suggested above, by helping to increase the General Fund of the Hospital, secondly, by adding to the Capital of the Huguenot Victoria Memorial Fund, and thirdly, by strengthening the Library in the way already indicated.

Forms of application for admission to the Hospital and any further information may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary or from the Steward at the Hospital or by personal application to the Committee which meets as a rule on the first Saturday in each month.

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